

His Soul to Keep

BY ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS

"HAS the carrier come?"

"Yes."

"And gone?"

"Some time ago."

"No letters?"

"Only a few bills, or receipts. I put them on his desk."

"Nothing for me? You are sure?"

"Quite sure."

The figure on the bed turned its face to the wall. The figure in the cap and apron dropped upon the patient a glance more professional than personal—one of the sort which drives the sick to a mutiny none the less pronounced because helpless and hopeless.

There were moments when Mrs. Glessner could cheerfully have flung boiling hot water bags at Miss Peck, not without the spectral wish that the rubber might burst. There were others when she regarded the nurse with a grateful glow that could almost be called affectionate, and checked herself in the act of conversation verging on the confidential. She vibrated between the emotional extremes of a monotonous but well cared for invalid life.

Now the face upon the pillow—it was an attractive face, not marred by any of the corrosive disorders—flung itself over suddenly, and a pair of delicately rounded arms rose out of lace elbow-sleeves and shot straight into the air with a gesture which Miss Peck knew well.

"Is the door open?"

"Yes."

"Is the hall door open?"

"Yes."

"Are *all* the doors open so we could hear the telephone?"

"Every one."

"So *I* could hear it?"

"I don't see how you could help it."

"You are sure there has not been any message?"

"Perfectly sure."

"Would you mind going down and

asking the Central if we have missed any call?"

"I will go as soon as I have attended to a few things."

"Would you mind going now?"

"I suppose not.—No, I will go."

... "There wasn't any message, was there?"

"Not any."

"Do you think it's too late for any, to-night?"

"He never calls up after ten o'clock. He don't want to spoil your night."

"He is very thoughtful of me," said Mrs. Glessner.

The nurse made no reply.

The patient watched her with a furtive interest. Miss Peck was a small person. She had a profile like a squirrel's; her mouth was kind and weak; her eyes were bright and experienced. She had the shrill American voice; it filled the ear and brain. Miss Peck's had become the chief society of a naturally vivacious but sensitive, now too sensitive, woman. The fatal human repugnance to solitude fed, however sparingly, upon the nurse. The invalid had gone so far as to wish that she could love Miss Peck.

Melicent Glessner had not yielded easily to her fate. In fighting phrase, she had "died hard." Even yet she was not bed-ridden; not perhaps so much from force of heroism as from personal fastidiousness. She was a vigorous hater (good lovers are apt to be), and had battled with her doom all the way down, abhorring the evidences of descent in the curving lines of strength. She loved health, youth, beauty, admiration, tenderness, love; she had known them all. She liked action, eagerness, social attrition, the incidents of the hour; the natural human impulses were strong in her; she craved the wine of joy, and used to think that she was born to drink it. There was not a hypochondriac nerve in her; she had rung to the tuning-fork of hope as long as any

string of her responded to the key. She was not particularly patient, and did her share of complaining, as any hearty, undisciplined creature will; but she was not ill-natured, nor sour in the flavor. She was not what we call a religious woman, although she had been taught, when she was a child, to respect a type of faith which in maturity she had not cultivated. In a word, she was no saint; only a woman—a very woman—smitten by the sword of suffering which lays the soul and body low. She had been stabbed through and through, but she had not perished. For years she had cherished a pugnacious instinct of recovery. When the knowledge of the facts was made known to her, by one of the physicians who will not tell professional lies, she had fought fiercely with the truth, and then accepted it as she had defied it—altogether. At first she used to speak of it to her husband; it was not easy not to share such a great thing with some human creature who loved her; but she had long since given that up. It was her first lesson in the grammar of self-conquest, of which the well know so little and the sick must learn so much.

"I see it now. It was a kind of rudeness," she said aloud to the only consciousness that she could address upon so intimate a topic. This, plainly, was not Miss Peck's. Then what? Had the atmosphere intelligence? The rose tint on the four walls of her silent room—had it sentience? Did the stars hear, on winter nights when the shade was lifted for them to look coldly through? Had the frosty moon a soul? Did the brutal wind experience sympathy? Could the picture of one's dead mother smiling underneath the Leonardo's Christ above the mirror answer when one cried out? By degrees, very quietly but very plainly, it had become apparent to the denied woman that *something* answered;—not always, not explicitly, but sometimes, and in some way. She had begun to be aware of a soft encroachment upon the reserve of her loneliness; a movement of spirit towards her own. She did not go so far as to call it an interchange of intelligence; she was chiefly conscious of it as a delicate blender of feeling blurring the outlines of her solitude.

This, in Harris Glessner's necessary

and altogether pardonable absences from her, was mainly unrelieved. When he was at home he was attentive to his wife, whom he had rapturously loved, and whom he still cherished when he could. When he was serving his country at the capital his opportunities to make poor Mele's lot easier to bear were, of course, limited by his civic obligations. He had accepted his nomination reluctantly; she had urged him, and her physician had permitted him to do so. Mele was young, and might live for twenty years. Glessner purposed to return to his law practice in a year or so. Meantime she could make a home with him in Washington for the winter. But she shook her head.

"We tried that last year. How long did I stay? Six weeks? I can't undergo another earthquake just now. I'm not quite so well able." This was so obviously true that the matter had dropped.

"Try it," she had said,—“try it for one session. If I find that I take it hard—if I grow worse—”

"If you grow worse, you sha'n't have to take it at all," he vowed, eagerly. He ran home as often as he could; usually every week. He wrote. He telephoned. Between committees he thought of her a good deal. But she—she thought of him all the time and in all the ways that a deprived and lonely and idle woman can think of a well and overworked man.

That, in a sense, was the worst of it—her terrible power of concentration upon the man whom she had happened to love and marry. This, if a fault, was a wholly feminine one, belonging to the class of wifely traits which might be supposed to appeal to a man, but seldom do. At the beginning of her illness she had followed her temperament, and had encroached upon his with the *naïveté* of one who is inexperienced in suffering. She had exacted and exhausted; she had claimed and accepted. She had fed upon his sympathy and had assumed his presence; she took his devotion—for he had given her no inconsiderable amount of it—as a matter of course, and it was a long time before it occurred to her that a too dependent sick woman may bring a man more discipline than happiness.

Melicent possessed one quality which, when the eternal two enter the caves of disillusion, is more valuable than beauty,

charm, or intellect: she had good sense. This enabled her, after a time, to readjust the attitude of her expectations. Her life was like her electric fan—whirring feverishly, now at a lower, now at a higher pace, but always fixed to its base; never getting anywhere; always hearing its own outcries, by which it worried or wearied the listener. Sometimes, on a hot August night when the current was turned on at the power house afresh, at one o'clock in the morning, it would seem to her as if her soul must rush out on the gusts of the artificial wind and wander through space, a disconnected, freed, but unappeased identity, clamoring for what it could not have, obedient as machinery, but *perhaps—who knew?*—as rebellious at the secret of its being. She felt a curious kinship with the helpless thing.

Now it was February, and the heavy fan stood silent upon its firm shelf on the other side of the bed. Melicent glanced at it compassionately.

"You cannot even complain," she thought.

She had experienced several years of captivity before it came to her knowledge that escape from her fate was possible. At first all her thoughts swung towards life. She expected—in fact, she commanded—recovery; she pushed her way towards all the remedial doors, and when she found one locked, clamored at another. Her mind dwelt upon health, on healing, on salvation. Afterwards, as the long disabled do, she rebounded, and hated that which she had so passionately and vainly sought. She weighed her lot and flung it from her with a healthy contempt which no well person is sound enough to understand.

She began to believe that she wished to die. She was quite sincere in this conviction, and when she learned at last that her preference might be gratified at any unknown time she was surprised to find that the news gave her so little pleasure. That it should be in the nature of her malady to bring the clockwork of life to a sharp stop without warning seemed, somehow, bad manners. A sheriff or an executioner had more courtesy. Death, it appeared, felt under no obligations to show any. One might live ten years, or as many minutes; five years, or five seconds. What of it?

Now that her heart's desire had become practicable, what was there so tragic in the fact? She was perplexed to find that her instinct leaped against her conviction in the direction of life. Life! . . . Mere life . . . plain, commonplace life . . . that which it had been so easy to condemn and habitual to hate! Life . . . hard life, denied, disabled, forbidden of hope, and captive to that dejection which only the long afflicted can distinguish from despair . . . cruel life . . . torn by the beasts of suffering, refused the angels of healing . . . just life!

She stood astonished before the windows of revelation. The natural vigor of her soul arose and opened them. After all, in face of everything, did she crave the despised and rejected thing that she had trampled? Did she *want* to live?

She had never been what we call a morbid person, and it was a curious fact that her chief danger of becoming such arrived by the way of her healthiest impulse. In the very splendid sanity of her revolt against death she began to experience such a fear of it as she had never known or imagined.

It was not so much to the incident of dying that she objected—this had for a long time presented itself to her rather as a circumstance than an event—but to the prospective abruptness of the circumstance. She had dreamed of death as a friend, or even a lover. Now she was face to face with a highwayman or assassin. Had she coughed or ached her life away, decently and in order, by a conventional process, she was sure that she should have welcomed a release which now began to assume all the hues and contours of alarm.

Melicent was by nature sincere, and she acknowledged to herself that the ambush of death occupied the foreground of her thoughts, but no method of avoiding the fact occurred to her.

None at least occurred to her by any philosophy of life that she had known—or Harris Glessner, either, for that matter. They had both been people of the world—the live, visible world, throbbing with pleasures and ambitions, silken with luxuries, clamorous of joy, vocal with self, the well world (until she had been smitten), and this is to



Drawn by W. D. Stevens

Half-tone plate engraved by W. H. Clark

"I AM NOT BRAVE. I AM WORN OUT"

say the supreme word of it. They had been the children of good fortune, pampered and arrogant of personal and mutual happiness.

Now it seemed there were other worlds. Pain, denial, desolation, despair—these strange planets, which had appeared upon her unprepared astronomy in their order, preceded the gentle movement into its appointed place of that other which is called the world of the unseen. Persons who lack certain of the finer forms of development do not use the adjectives defining them; and she, who had no religious life, did not use its terms. She did not say to herself that the star which was slowly revolving into the map of her sad skies was the world of spiritual things. She did not call it so, because she did not know enough to name it. Rather she felt it to be so before she knew it. For a time she rested mistily in her feeling, as creation rests in nebulousity before form occurs. When does it occur? Did chaos recognize the moment when construction stood apparent? Who, though he watch the night out, can capture the instant of dawn? Who sees when the breathing, blushing torch of perfume and of color ceases to be a bud and is a rose?

There came at last an hour when Melicent perceived that her rose was afire, her dawn abloom, her chaotic world an ordered cosmos, swinging out of haunted darkness into solemn light.

It was a snowy night, and the wind was wild. The knuckles of the storm knocked upon the windows eagerly, as if an organism without called upon that within. Melicent had been less strong than usual, and breathed with difficulty. She had been thinking all day about her husband—God knew why—uneasily. All her thoughts and feeling returned upon herself, baffled and beaten, like homing pigeons that could not be induced to fly unless they were carried to a distance by force.

It was never possible afterwards for her to explain the manner of her soul when it became suddenly but very quietly apparent to her that it communicated with Soul beyond itself. Out of the storm, cleaving the dark, the wings of intelligence, emotion, power, replied to

her; and she perceived for the first time in her own consciousness that there was such a fact as human prayer.

She struggled against her pillows and sat erect, stretching out her beautiful arms.

"God!" she cried. "Great God!"

She sank back, panting. Her ignorance of the world of spirit—its supernatural heights, its sacred depths—overwhelmed her with a sudden shame.

"I do not know the language," she said. "I am an uneducated person."

She got up and groped to the window, trying to fling it wide; but the sleet had frozen, and she could not stir the sash. She dropped upon the cushioned seat below and laid her face upon the sill. The room seemed as small as asphyxiation. Only the night, the storm, the skies, immensity, were large enough to hold the mighty impulse which enveloped her.

"Thou Unseen!" she said aloud, "I am a prisoner of the body. I cannot break my bars. My fetters are sore upon me. I suffer more than anybody knows . . . it is making a coward of me. I bear it very badly. I am not brave. I am worn out. I hate my life—oh, I loathe my life—and yet I have this inconsistency . . . I cannot understand it in myself . . . I am afraid to die. Is that not contemptible? Nobody understands it . . . no well person . . . how could they? No, nor any of the people who die slowly . . . in their beds, persons they love holding their hands, because you know when it will be. But not to know . . . never to know . . . any minute—and every little thing that happens lessening the chances . . . and not to be a religious person, either. I used to have such a happy life. I was well, and the world was gay, like tulips in the grass. I went to dinners, I loved my husband. I enjoyed myself. I did not expect to be like this . . . not to suffer this way . . . not to be crushed out as you'd step on a crawling creature . . . just the motion of some awful Foot . . ."

She sank from the cushion to the floor and reached for her bell, but withdrew her shaking hand.

"I won't," she thought. "I will *not* have Sarah Peck around . . . not just now . . . not if I do die!"

Her emotion and her will duelled together, and for the first time the agitation which had almost overpowered her went down before the stronger force. She lay where she was till she could crawl; and then, crawling, reached her bed. That first acute, coherent prayer went nigh to being her last.

"It is plain," she said, "I cannot even pray like other people. . . . One must have more strength . . . and then I do not say things in the proper way."

With her indomitable good sense she added,

"A person cannot be expected to kill herself praying."

Now, while she lay there, smiling whimsically, for she had the saving quality of humor when suffering gave it half a chance, there came to her something which she had not recalled for who knew how long? It took the form of a sensation, as the acutest memory often will, and she leaned against a substance soft and warm. She perceived suddenly that it was her mother's knee. Above her a still face brooded and melted; it had the unfathomable tenderness that only mothers' faces are deep enough to know. She was a little girl, and she said her prayers as she had been taught, before she went to bed.

"Now I lay me down to sleep. . . ."

Melicent smiled. Too weak for emotion—even for the sacred emotion that may save one's soul alive,—forced to the parsimonious economy of feeling by which the sick are bound, she turned upon her tumbled pillow and her lips moved.

"Won't this do?" they said.

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep."

Miss Peck came running up.

"He is at the wire," she cried. "He called for you. He said not to disturb you, unless— Good Lord! I should say so! Put your two feet back upon that bed!—No. Not a livin' step, on my diploma! Here. I'll open the window for you. Can you hold on a minute till I ring him off?"

The nurse bent to the broken whispers that struggled from the pillow. "My dear love to him—and I have something to say to him . . . I will write. Miss

Peck? Miss Peck! Be sure and *thank* Mr. Glessner for taking the trouble to call me up to-night. If I had been a little stronger—"

But Miss Peck, at the long-distance wire, was wrestling with the powers and principalities of the storm.

"It cut us off," she said, discontentedly, when she hurried back.

Drama, like the kingdom of heaven, is within, not without.

It is the human spirit rather than the human incident that stands for energy and the thrill of life. It would not be easy to explain to the lover of a cheap stage or of a decadent novel the intensity of thought and feeling which now accelerated the existence of this invalid woman. She came into the spiritual inheritance with a quiet excitement which the passing of many days did not wear down. Your enthusiasm or mine may rush like a treader into the arena of a startling world. Hers fed upon the reality and the history of a prayer.

She wrote her husband when she had thought it well over, and tried to explain to him something of the novelty of that which had befallen her. She was surprised that she found this so hard to do, chiefly for lack of a common vocabulary; for she perceived from her own experience that he would not readily know what she was talking about. She did not see her way to make the subject interesting to him, and Melicent was not stupid. She never wrote him a dull letter. Now she observed that she must use a foreign tongue to her politician. Nevertheless, she wrote. He had planned to come home for a Sunday, but the bill before the Ways and Means, then occupying the attention of the country, needed him. He was detained, and regretfully telephoned to say so. She had not seen him for nearly three weeks: this was the longest separation of their lives. Glessner had not yet allowed his career to remove his wife from the foreground to the perspective of life.

Meanwhile she continued to pray as she continued to breathe. That outgoing of the spirit to the "not herself" which existed beyond her personal lot had become to her a strange necessity, like a

narcotic to the sleepless; yet she exercised her newly discovered energy with a restraint which would have commanded the respect of the coldest scoffer. Since that first rapturous break into the world of spiritual power she had never wasted her strength in superfluous emotion.

Each night she quietly gathered up the burden of the day into the words her mother taught her, and she made no effort to think or feel beyond them. When she laid her down to sleep she prayed the Lord her soul to keep, and that was the end of the matter. It could not be said that her fear of death was extinguished, but that it was superseded by something which she felt more keenly: the conscious effort to remove it by a newly attained faculty. Miss Peck's experienced eyes observed her patient with a studious perplexity. Sarah Peck perceived that she had to deal with something which was not taught in the hospitals. She wondered if the omission were in the surgical line.

"Has the carrier come?"

"Yes."

"And gone?"

"Oh yes."

"No letter to-day?"

"You had one yesterday."

"I know. I had reasons . . . something especial. Is the door open?"

"Oh yes."

"All the doors open between me and the telephone?"

"Just as usual; every one."

"You are sure there hasn't been any call?"

"Oh yes—sure. It ain't forty-eight hours since you had one. I never knew a man telephone his wife so much. It must cost a sight—all those long-distance tolls. . . . Ain't feeling quite so well, are you?"

"I don't know," replied Mrs. Glessner. "I had not thought . . . perhaps not. One has something else to think of than how one feels. . . . Would you go and ask the Central—no, never mind. Miss Peck? I don't want to hurt your feelings. But I think I should like to be alone for a little while."

"Here's your bell," said Sarah Peck, averting the profile of a grieved squirrel. She went away, but remained within

hearing of her patient, on the couch in the hall.

Mellicent lay still and looked about her room, as if the familiar details of it might reduce the force of some emotion whose current startled her. The pearl-white roses on her table were fresh (Harris had ordered them to come every other day); the velvet below them, beneath a mist of Mexican embroidery blurred into the rose tint of the walls; her magazines, with leaves uncut, disregarded her; her mother's Bible which Miss Peck had hunted up for her lay on the foot of the lace-draped bed; her mother's picture, with the Leonardo's Christ above it, had the manner of observing her. The large brass fan on its shelf stood stolidly but resentful, as if it would have crashed something to atoms if it could move; or perhaps it would have spun disdainfully and whirled into space, whence electric fires spring, and where they cannot be imprisoned to the whims of man.

The night was as sultry as it was still; a warm fog was crawling from some unexplained, one was almost tempted to say some unexperienced point of the compass, and the lungs of the air were paralyzed.

Mrs. Glessner panted upon the bed, but she had the unconsciousness of her personal discomfort which mental exaltation may give to physical suffering. She was drawn into the upper ether of a strange and mighty moment through which she seemed to herself to be swept like an indirigible air-ship, moving at the will of winds upon whose nature or force she could not count.

With motionless body, with closed eyes, she stirred and saw. A half a thousand miles away from her dim room, from her gray life, from Sarah Peck and the electric fan, she moved about the throbbing city where she had not set her foot for now six years. Those few poignant weeks of last winter scarcely counted, except as one of the nightmares in the dream of her troubled life.

Then, borne from her private car, by way of the easiest automobile in Washington, to her rooms, she had remained there until the experiment, disastrous for the invalid, and hardly less so for the husband, ended in a demonstrated failure.

Without a protest from any source, she had been taken back to her New England country home. She had not left it since.

Now, as she crossed the smooth pavement of the brilliant streets, curious old Bible words occurred to her: "I sought him whom my soul loveth . . . but I found him not. . . . I said, 'I will rise now . . . and seek him.'" She experienced no difficulty in finding his apartment, to which she was drawn by hidden currents as unseen but as effective as the wires which interlaced and lighted the house. Should love be less ingenious than electricity? She asked herself the question for the first time, smiling as she did so at the conceit.

His doors opened to her without ring or knock, and she crossed the vestibule to his parlor. There was a portière, of the sort common to hotel suites, a heavy, vulgar thing; it was of a dark color, maroon or Indian red. She stood half behind it, clinging to its plush folds, and—now for the first time conscious of fear lest she should be discovered, but made quickly aware that she was not—she gazed into the room.

Three men sat at a walnut centre-table. The table was littered with papers and cigar ashes. The room was purple with smoke. Out of its spiral coils the figures and faces of the men evolved. One presented an indifferent appearance—she could not have told herself anything about him except that his hair had once been red. The other was a heavy man with a furtive eye; his face was broad and blunt; his hands were more intelligent than the rest of his physique, and one of them played with a pencil. With the other he snapped the corners of envelopes sedulously, as if he were setting a paper trap. The third man was Harris Glessner. He was the only one of the three who was not smoking; he seemed to have laid aside his cigar to think better without it.

Melicent made an instinctive movement to go in and speak to her husband; she longed to put a hand upon his shoulder, an arm about his neck, but found that this was impossible; advance she could not, for whatever reason; but stood swaying, checked and forbidden, clinging to the portière. She knew little of politics

(she had sometimes asked him to explain that mystery, but Harris had replied that he did not like to talk shop with her), and she knew less of law; but she made out soon enough to understand that which smote her sick and still. He who sat making paper traps was proposing to Harris a monstrous thing: he was offering her husband—*her* husband—an opportunity of the questionable sort that approaches a man in a man's world; it had to do, she perceived, with his vote, or with his influence, with one of the sacred charges which the people confide to the brains and principles that they choose to represent them.

She was shocked to perceive that her husband did not receive the proposition as the insult that it was. Inscrutably silent, he sat with level eyes that scarcely saw the man who played with the envelopes. Glessner's cigar gleamed between his fingers; the strong lines about his mouth seemed to weaken as she watched; he was sunken in a pit of speculation or indecision.

The man who was talking snatched up a fresh envelope and twisted it into a curious form like that of the old-fashioned fly-traps which our mothers used to make, and suddenly tossed it aside. The envelope unfolded slowly from its unnatural shape, and revealed itself to the wife's eyes quite plainly; it was one that had been addressed in her husband's handwriting—and it was addressed to herself. As it was slipping over into the wastebasket, Harris put out his clean, white hand and reclaimed it; he put it in his pocket—gently, she thought; but still he did not speak. His silence distressed her; it seemed to her to imply a moral vacillation of which in her clinical world she had never dreamed that he could be capable, and she cried out:

"Harris! Harris! *Dear* Harris!" three times to him, piteously.

The cry caught her back again to her own room, to her own bed. There she lay, agitated beyond any agitation that she had ever known. Her quivering lips stirred. Self went out of her like a burden thrown a thousand miles down to lighten and quicken flight. She could no more have asked any personal comfort of the Almighty Heart than she could have sprung into a life-boat and left Har-

ris on deck of a drowning ship. All her being leaped to the side of his, and stood as if it would protect him, or perish with him.

But Melicent was now very tired and weak; she found it impossible to exercise her newly discovered spiritual faculties; these evaded her, as the spiritual will, from sheer physical inadequacy; she could not pray; she could not pray for her husband in any manner adjusted to the emergency in which, whether rightly or wrongly, she felt him to be. No words worthy of his need or her distress subjected themselves to her will. In utter weariness and discouragement she crept into those her mother taught her, as she had crept upon her mother's lap. Something other than her will wrought upon the prayer of her childhood this significant and beautiful revision:

"Now I lay me down to sleep,

I pray the Lord *his* soul to keep."

She slept little and brokenly, but towards morning floated into uneasy rest. The winter dawn was later than usual, for the fog was still solid, and rose like a wall between the windows and the world. Melicent's consciousness began where it left off in the night, and she found herself repeating words that grew from those with which she prayed herself asleep as rhyme grows to mating rhyme:

"Be near to bless him when I wake,

I pray the Lord for his dear sake."

Her mind was quite clear and strong, and moved without delirium or delusion in the direction whence her heart propelled it. She thought of her husband—she thought of him without respite,—but all her vigor was now in her mind and heart. Her body had become suddenly and unaccountably weak. This fact she did not notice; or if she did, she gave no sign. She never permitted herself to be what is called "sick abed," but lay upon the outside of it, beneath her rose-pink puff. Miss Peck observed her, not without anxiety.

"I sent for the doctor," she said. "Just our luck—he's gone off; out of town somewhere. You'll have to let me call one the others."

But Mrs. Glessner shook her head. She was paying the least possible attention to anything the nurse was saying, and this Miss Peck perceived.

"Tain't a good day," she suggested, consolingly. "You might as well be a mouse in a glass bell. There ain't any air *to* breathe. There! I believe I'll turn your fan on."

The patient did not answer, and Miss Peck switched the fan first to its gentlest, then to its fiercest speed. The room was gray, although the shades were flung to the top: the fog pressed up against the windows like the depths of a motionless sea which had arisen silently in the night and engulfed the house. The two women looked into it and up through it like divers from some unfathomable submarine depth. Miss Peck went to the window, and returned uneasily to the bed. The hand which crept to the patient's pulse was pushed away, not without some vigor.

"I don't want to be bothered about my pulse," said Mrs. Glessner; "I have things to think of." She lay staring steadily into the fog.

The fan was whirling wildly, fixed to its base, unable to escape. Melicent felt as if it were trying to whirl off into space, and that it would drag her with it if it could. The sound of it was half articulate, wholly uncanny, and filled the world.

Miss Peck stepped softly out into the hall, but a voice from the bed detained her.

"Miss Peck, you will not telephone—not yet. Wait a while. I am not as sick as you think. I don't wish Mr. Glessner disturbed—not yet."

"Very well," said Miss Peck, soothingly. "I s'pose you'll let me go down and heat your beef tea, won't you? There's no objection to *that*, is there? I am going, anyhow."

She slid down-stairs and went to the telephone as straight as she could go. She had taken the precaution to shut the doors.

Sarah Peck sat at the telephone with an inspired obstinacy upon her face. The squirrel in her profile seemed to come out and crack a hard nut. She was an experienced telephoner, and the wire carried her piercing American voice very distinctly through the windless, resonant fog. "There!" she said, when, after the necessary delay of the long-distance message, she hung up the receiver, "I'm not going to be ordered around by any patient."

Drawn by W. D. Stevens

HE WAS OFFERING AN OPPORTUNITY OF THE SORT THAT APPROACHES A MAN IN A MAN'S WORLD



She ain't fit to judge, God help her.—I don't s'pose God has much to do with it," she added, with the natural materialism of her profession. "It's husbands are the Almighty, most cases, as far as I can see."

Sarah Peck came back with her beef tea.

"You've been telephoning," said Mrs. Glessner. "I know it as well as if I had heard you."

"Well, yes," said Sarah Peck, "I did. I telephoned to my gentleman friend. I had something important to say to him, and I thought you wouldn't mind."

"I didn't know you *had* a gentleman friend," observed the patient, with a spark of feminine wickedness. "He never came here to see you, did he?"

"I don't allow him to come when I am on cases," returned Miss Peck, primly.

The fog, as it thickened, changed its nature, as fogs do; the wall had toppled into the ocean; the sea crinkled into a sponge—a huge, unwieldy, pitiless sponge, held at the face and pressed down hard. Melicent found herself putting out her hands and trying to push it away. As the day crawled on, and Mrs. Glessner's condition did not improve, Miss Peck took this nut, too, into her own teeth and cracked it. She sent for the foreign doctor, who left drugs which the patient refused, and went away. After his visit, Miss Peck applied herself to the long-distance wire again, but failed to connect her number with that of anybody's gentleman friend, and returned to her post up-stairs. The patient slept, or seemed to sleep, and the rage of the electric fan filled the room.

Now, in truth Melicent was not sleeping; she was feeling; she might have said that she was praying, except that, as we have noticed, she was still unused to the terminology, and the religious phrase did not readily occur to her. All day her emotion outran her strength, but all day it ran the old, beautiful, self-effacing road of a wife's love. She seemed to have lost the occult power, or the telepathic gift—call it what you will—of the previous evening, and no longer with mind or eye could she follow the image of her husband. Nothing was left her; by no way could she project herself towards him, except in the simple words which had got possession of her. She rang the

changes upon them in the fluctuations of her strength. Whether she had enough of it left to take her through the day or the night was a matter which had ceased to occupy her thoughts. She did not concern herself whether she should live or die; she concerned herself with him.

"I pray the Lord for his dear sake—"

"For his dear sake—"

"I pray the Lord his soul to keep."

It might be said that her being had now no articulation beyond these gentle outcries. As the night drew on, Miss Peck noticed that her lips moved, and stooped to catch some wish or sign of suffering from her. The nurse was embarrassed to find that the patient was praying. The staff had not taught the training-school what to do for such a symptom. Sarah Peck wished that she could have recorded on her chart the fluctuations of a condition which made a patient look like that; but she missed them, obviously. She felt that this was the fault of the electric fan, which raved like thwarted love or an escaping soul about the room. All night the fan disturbed itself—now madly, now patiently—but all night it had the energy of a purpose, as if it would achieve God knew what, or perish. He knew how. Melicent heard it plainly, and it did not seem to trouble her. She felt herself whirling on with it, spinning into spaces unseen, acquiring powers unknown, growing one with the mysterious forces of nature, which went upon their awful errands, and returned when these were done. She felt as solitary as if she had been cast out into ether, the only thing that had no orbit, and so went seeking one with all its being. Now the fan itself seemed to have taken the words from her too weak lips, and to repeat them in the strange, half-querulous tones of the ever-living and all-demanding elements:

"I pray the Lord . . ."

"I pray the Lord his soul to keep."

In the morning she was no better; perhaps, as she tried to assure Miss Peck, no worse. She experienced unusual need of sleep, and drifted into it again, almost as soon as she awoke.

The day was vivid when she turned upon her pillow and fully found herself.

For once she had not been able to get into her pretty gowns and play that she was not sick abed, but lay still beneath the rose puff in her white nightdress with its lace elbow sleeves, her long hair braided in two bright braids, and her sweet, gray profile set towards the window.

There was no fog. Walls and seas and smothering sponges had melted and were not. The sun was shining joyously. A dart of it had stabbed through the lace curtain and reached the wall above the mirror, where it seemed to pierce like a golden nail and support the pictures of her mother and the great Christ: these regarded her smiling, she thought.

It did not occur to her for a few moments that some one was holding her hand. Plainly it could not be Sarah Peck, and she had not thought of herself as sick enough for the doctor to do that. She turned and took a leisurely look, and across the lenses of her eyes there passed the image of her husband sitting still and pale beside the bed.

"I am having that strange experience again," she thought. "It is not Harris; it is the vision of Harris. It will pass—as the other passed. I will hold it as long as I can. . . . *Dear Harris!*" she said aloud.

But then she perceived that it was not his vision; it was not the wraith of his body, nor of her own, that met in that long, warm, silent hand-clasp, too intimate at first to be broken by any words. She saw that he was trying not to startle her, as he had been cautioned, so she spoke before he dared to, quite as if he had been there every day.

"Why, dear," she said, "good morning!"

She was surprised to find that he could not answer. The emotion in his face did not arouse her own, because she was too weak to feel any. But it drew them together by quiet, invisible currents. He stooped, and their lips found each other. She did not feel able to lift herself from the pillow, but lay observing him gently: his strong head, sparsely dashed with gray, his experienced, kind, gray eyes alert and worldly, but luminous with the consciousness of her. The lines about his mouth were all strong now; it shut with a tender resolution.

She had half forgotten how massive his shoulders were. He had the firm at-

titudes of the successful man. One of his white, authoritative hands sank into the down of the rose-pink silk above her body as if to make sure that he had not lost her. The other held her own cold fingers. These were growing slowly warm within his vital grasp.

Miss Peck appeared in the doorway with warning eyes, and went away.

"Mele," said Glessner, "we must not talk—not yet."

"How long are you going to stay?" asked Mclicent.

"Oh, any length of time. Until you get well."

"Isn't that rather a large proposition?"

"I don't care how large.—Why didn't you send for me before?"

"I didn't send for you at all. You see, I was so busy."

"Busy?"

"Busy thinking," she said, dreamily. She reached for his free hand, and disengaging hers from the other, made him understand that he should place it on the pillow, so that she could turn her cheek upon it, and in that nest of love and warmth she rested with a divine content. He sat beside her, scarcely stirring.

As the day deepened, she strengthened. He perceived that whatever her burden was it would now harm her less to share it than to wear it, and when he saw that she was determined to speak he did not gainsay her, but bent and listened; guardedly, she thought—not without the pickets in his handsome eyes.

Her gaze traversed his familiar lineaments; it was as if she sought a new road across the map of him. Suddenly her pathological existence seemed to her so small a matter beside his vigorous and powerful one that her courage fell, and what she had purposed to say failed her altogether; so she plunged into the last words she had meant to utter:

"Harris, what did those two men want of you?"

Glessner stared upon her.

"Night before last—that foggy night. It was at your hotel. One of them had red hair. The other—I hate the other. They were trying to persuade you to something. It was something you thought you ought not to do."

"Do you often have bad dreams of this sort, Mele?" asked Glessner, in the



Drawn by W. D. Stevens

Half-tone plate engraved by F. A. Pettit

"WHAT WILL BECOME OF YOUR CAREER?"

soothing tones of an alienist. But Mele disregarded him without the tolerance of a smile.

"Ought you to have done it?" she persisted.

The guards in the politician's eyes retreated; they were replaced by a species of superstitious discomfort.

"Probably not," he parleyed, "if one had red hair, and since you hate the other—" He tried to laugh it off, but still sat staring. Mele caught her feeble breath.

"Did you do it?" she demanded.

"If you could possibly explain yourself—" he urged. Then his manner veered abruptly, and he seemed to weigh and measure what she had been saying. She followed this change of posture as quickly as it occurred.

"He made fly-traps out of envelopes at your table," she suggested, in a matter of fact tone.

"She has been delirious," thought Glessner. But he did not say so. He only sat beside her, staring still.

"Did you do it?" she repeated.

"No, thank God!" said Glessner, in a ringing voice. "No—and I never will!"

"No," reiterated Mele, comfortably. "Of course you never will. You *couldn't*, could you?"

"Oh, look here!" cried the Congressman, "I won't take what I don't deserve—not from you. How does a man know what he could or couldn't do? He is the equivalent of his temptation, or he is not. How is he to know whether he is, or isn't, till the thing gets a mathematical form? Suppose a fellow finds a weak spot in himself—a rotten one, if you say so—pretty late in life, when he had thought he was safe—like that! And then, just like that! too, he thinks—he thought—Mele, Mele! I thought of *you*."

"I know," nodded Mele. "The envelope was addressed to me. You took it away from him. It reminded you."

But Glessner did not seem to hear her; he hurried, trembling, along.

"Anyhow, I didn't, and here I am. And here you are—alive. I'll never leave you again!"

"Oh yes, you will," smiled Mele. "What would your constituents say?"

"Hang my constituents!"

"Poor things!" said Mele, mischievous-

ly. "They didn't mean any harm—when they elected you."

But he could not smile, and did not try.

"I'll be good to you," he gulped.

"You always *have* been good to me!" protested Mele. "You are the kindest man I ever knew. And thoughtful—look at those roses!"

She pointed a frail finger at the pearl-white buds. He caught the finger to his lips, and then her hand, her wrist, her arm.

"I'll get out of it as soon as I can. I'll come back to law—and you."

"What will become of the country?" inquired Mele. "What will become of your career?"

"Hang my career!" exploded the politician.

"Dear," said Mele, ruefully, "I've been such a drag on you, shut in here—always ailing—never able to do things for you like other men's wives. Not even to stay in Washington the way other women do, never to order your house, can't entertain your friends—just shrivelling here with Sarah Peck—and an electric fan—to ask the Lord for your dear sake—"

"Mele," said the Congressman, in an undertone, "if women only knew! But they don't, the best of them. There isn't a well, surface-loving woman in the land who could have done the kind of thing for me you have, you brave girl! You patient, sensitive, thinking, *feeling* creature! . . . What has got into your letters lately? You never wrote any like them before. I won't pretend I understood them, but sentences from them got between me and the bill. I was answering one that night when—but never mind that any more. Why, Mele, what is Washington? What is political society? A house of cards, Blaine called it. Suppose you could have been there, playing the old stupid game? Do you believe you could have—well, I don't, that's all. You haven't the least idea what *character* does for a fellow; then there's the way of loving him. There's an assorted lot of ways, and yours, Mele,—*yours* . . . Oh, you shall get well!" he cried, boyishly. "I will make you so happy you will have to get well. Mele, Mele, Mele!" he entreated her.

Mele lifted a shining, inscrutable smile. She put up her hand to his cheek.